DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 239 543 HE 016 965

AUTHOR Wilson, Dawn K.; And Others
TITLE Instructor's Competency Rating as a Function of Academic Status and Classroom Distraction.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (San Francisco, CA, April 27-30, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Rank (Professional); *Classroom Environment; College Faculty; Higher Education; *Noise (Sound); *Student Attitudes; *Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance

ABSTRACT

The effect of distraction and instructor academic status on competency ratings of instructors was studied. It was hypothesized that (1) the higher the academic status of the instructor, the higher the competency rating and (2) the more the distraction, the lower the competency rating. The 56 undergraduate student subjects were assigned to experimental conditions whereby they were told the instructor's academic status or they were exposed to distractions. Two confederates posed as subjects and carried on a conversation every 2 minutes. During the presentation, the instructor ignored the distraction. Students rated the instructor on a six-point Likert-type scale after the presentation. Both hypotheses were supported; however, an interaction effect indicated that the graduate instructor was rated as more competent than the undergraduate instructor only when a distraction was present. It is concluded that the higher the academic status of an instructor, the less the instructor needs to be concerned about being judged as incompetent. Since status was only significant in the distraction condition, it appears that a lower-status instructor has to place high priority on controlling distraction in order to be thought competent. (Author/SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED239543

Instructor's Competency Rating as a Function of Academic Status and Classroom Distraction

Dawn K. Wilson
San Diego State University
Michelle LaLouche
San Diego State University
Herbert Harari
San Diego State University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Dawn K. Wilson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

NE 016 965

Running head: Instructor's Competency Rating

Abstract

Researchers have investigated the effects of environmental distraction on interpersonal judgements (e.g. Siegel & Steele, 1980). Siegel et al. found that individuals were more willing to make ill-considered judgements of other people when they were in a distracting setting. Other researchers have found that professors received higher evaluations in team-taught psychology courses, than graduate students (e.g. Nation, LeUnes & Gray, 1976).

The purpose of the present study was to determine whether academic status and distraction would have an effect on competency ratings of instructors. It was hypothesized that (1) the higher the academic status of the instructor (experimenter) the higher the competency rating and (2) the more the distraction the lower the competency rating.

Fifty-six undergraduate college students were randomly assigned to conditions. In the graduate and undergraduate conditions the subjects were told the academic status of the experimenter. In the distraction condition two confederates posing as subjects carried on a conversation every two minutes, while the experimenter gave a lecture on stress. The experimenter completely ignored the distraction. After the presentation was given, all subjects were asked to rate the experimenter on a six point Likert-type scale (Commoner, 1972).

Mean competency rating scores were subjected to a 2 x 2 analysis of variance. The results indicated significant main

effects supporting both hypotheses. However, a significant interaction effect indicated that the graduate instructor was rated as more competent than the undergraduate instructor only when a distraction was present. Since distraction only affected the undergraduate's rating it was concluded that the higher the academic status of an instructor, the less that instructor needs to be concerned about being judged as incompetent (cf. Hollander, 1958 on idiosyncratic credit). Since status was only significant in the distraction condition, it appears that , a lower-status instructor has to put high priority on controlling distraction in order to be thought of as competent. Inasmuch as in the present study distraction was ignored by the instructor, an area for further research may be the difference between controlled and uncontrolled distraction.

Abstract

Fifty - six undergraduate college students in an introductory psychology course were asked to rate the competency of either an experimenter posing as a graduate student or the same experimenter posing as an undergraduate student. The subjects were randomly assigned to graduate or undergraduate, and distraction (uncontrolled classroom conversation) or no distraction conditions. The independent variables were academic status and distraction. The dependent variable was the competency rating of the experimenter on a six point Likert-type scale (Commoner, 1972). It was hypothesized that (1) the higher the academic status of the instructor (experimenter) the higher the competency rating and (2) the more distraction the lower the competency rating. A 2 x 2 between subjects analysis of variance indicated significant effects supporting both hypotheses. A significant interaction revealed that in the low status treatments, competency ratings were higher in the no distraction than in the distraction condition. Furthermore, in the distraction treatments, competency ratings were higher in the graduate than in the undergraduate condition. Implications for further research were discussed.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Instructor's Competency Rating as a Function of Academic Status and Classroom Distraction

Researchers have conducted extensive studies to increase our knowledge about cognitive processes. It has been suggested that cognitive biases play an important role in stereotyping (Hamilton, 1976; Hamiltion & Gifford, 1970; Rothbart, Folero, Jensen, howard & Birrell., in press). In addition, studies have suggested that groups of individuals are reluctant to believe ill of high status people and will go to great lengths to justify nonconformity by those of high status (e.g. Wahrman, 1972). However, Wahrman inferred that little or no effort was devoted to justifying the same nonconformity in low status people.

Some researchers have studied the effects of source status and message favorability on acceptance of personality feedback. Halperin, Snyder, Shenkel and Houston (1976) demonstrated that people accept artificial generalized personality interpretations as being accurate descriptions of their personalities. It was also found that as the discrepancy of the message increased, subjects were influenced only by high status sources (Aronson, Turner & Carlsmith, 1963; Cochner & Insko, 1966).

Other researchers have considered status to be an outcome of interaction referred to as idiosyncrasy credit (e.g. Hollander, 1958). According to Hollander this phenomenon is the accumulation of positively-disposed impressions residing in the perceptions of relevant others.

It is defined operationally in terms of the degree to which an individual may deviate from the common expectancies of a group. Hollander explained that affiliation with a group as perceived by the group ceases when the individual's credit balance reaches zero. He defined credit as an individual's ability to achieve some level of status within a group.

More complex studies have investigated environmental distraction and information-processing strategies (Dawes, 1964; Milgram, 1970), in addition to the effects of distraction on interpersonal judgements (Baron, Baron & Miller, 1973; Siegel & Steele, 1980). Siegel and Steele have suggested that distracting and noisy environments lead to interpersonal response biases, such as prematurely categorizing others. They also found that individuals were more willing to make ill-considered judgements of other people, regardless of how appropriate these judgements were, when they were in a distracting setting.

The purpose of the present study was to determine whether academic status and distraction would have an effect on the competency ratings of instructors. It has been suggested that professors receive higher evaluations in team-taught psychology courses, than graduate students (Nation, LeUnes & Gray, 1976). Nation et. al. also found that the graduate students ratings were lower when they taught after the professors rather than preceding the professors. It was hypothesized that (1) the higher the academic status of the instructor (experimenter), the higher the competency rating and (2) the more distraction, the lower

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the competency rating of the instructor.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 56 undergraduate college students in an introductory psychology course, participating in the experiment as part of a course requirement.

Materials

A questionnaire was used to assess the experimenter's competency and contained the question "Overall how would you rate the experimenter?". A six point Likert-type scale was designed to rate the experimenter as being: 1 extremely incompetent, 2 incompetent, 3 somewhat incompetent, 4 somowhat competent, 5 competent, and 6 extremely competent (Commoner, 1972).

Procedure

Subjects were randomly assigned to graduate or undergraduate, and distraction or no distraction conditions. In the graduate conditions, the experimenter told the subjects that she was a graduate student at San Diego State University and that she was completing her Master Thesis on stress, which would be submitted for federal funding. The experimenter then gave a twenty minute presentation on stress and ways of dealing with stress. In the graduate conditions the experimenter wore a pleated wool skirt, matching jacket, and boots. In the undergraduate conditions, the experimenter told the subjects that she was an undergraduate student at San Diego State University and that the experiment was her 410 experimental psychology project on stress. The same

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

presentation on stress was given. However, in the undergraduate conditions the experimenter wore pants, blouse, and carried a backpack.

In both distraction and no distraction conditions there were two confederates posing as subjects. In the distraction conditions confederates carried on a conversation every two minutes for 30 seconds. The conversation consisted of specificly outlined items such as: "How is your family?" and "How are your classes going?". The experimenter completely ignored the two confederates. In the no distraction conditions there was no talking between the confederates.

After the presentation on stress was given by the experimenter, all subjects were told to answer a questionnaire that would rate the competency of the experimenter. They were also told to be as honest as possible and not to write their names. After completing the questionnaires the subjects were asked lead-in questions to the debriefing to get verbal feedback. For example, "What do you think this experiment was really about?" and "Did you notice anything unusual that transpired during this experiment?" were typical questions asked. In all conditions, after discussing lead-in questions subjects were debriefed.

Design

A 2 x 2 between subjects design was used to analyze the effects of the independent variables Academic Status (graduate, undergraduate) and Distraction (distraction, no distraction) on the dependent variable, Competency ratings.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Results

Mean competency rating scores were subjected to a 2 x 2 between subjects analysis of variance (see Table 1 and Figure 1) with the between subjects factor of Status (graduate, undergraduate), and the other between subjects factor of Distraction (distraction, no distraction). There was a significant main effect for Status, with significantly higher competency rating scores for graduate condition subjects (M = 5.25) than for undergraduate condition subjects (M = 4.88). There was also a significant main effect for Distraction, with higher competency rating scores for nondistracted subjects (M = 5.38) than for distracted subjects (M = 4.75). Furthermore, there was a significant Status x Distraction interaction effect. Subsequent post hoc comparisons (Newman-Keuls) showed significantly higher competency rating scores for graduate condition subjects (M = 5.14) than for undergraduate condition subjects (M = 4.38) in the distraction condition only. Subsequent post hoc comparisons (Newman-Keuls) also showed significantly higher competency rating scores for nondistracted subjects (M = 5.40) than for distracted subjects (M = 4.38) in the undergraduate condition only. All other effects were nonsignificant.

Insert Table 1 and Figure 1 about here

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Discussion

It was hypothesized that (1) the higher the academic status of the instructor (experimenter) the higher the competency rating of the instructor and (2) the more distraction the lower the competency rating of the instructor. The results indicated significant main effects, supporting both hypotheses. However, subjects in the graduate condition gave higher competency ratings than subjects in the undergraduate condition only if the distraction was present. Furthermore, the nondistracted subjects gave higher competency ratings than the distracted subjects in the undergraduate condition only.

Overall, this experiment revealed several interesting findings. First, because distraction only affected competency ratings in the undergraduate conditions, we concluded that the higher the academic status the less likely would an instructor be judged as incompetent. Secondly, because status was only a significant effect in the distraction condition, we concluded that as disruptions or distractions increase in a classroom situation, the lower status instructor must increase his/her control over these disruptions to be thought of as competent by others. In confirmation of the present study, Nation et al. found that the higher the status of an instructor, the higher the instructor's evaluation by students.

The analogue-type methodology may have exerted some confounding effects of distraction on the instructor's presentation, as was the fact that real graduate and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

undergraduate students were not used as experimenters. Another area for further research would be the difference between controlled and uncontrolled distraction. By researching this difference, suggestions for how instructors can deal with distractions effectively may be offered, which could have implications for educational systems and training programs. Other suggested areas for further research include studying the effects of different kinds of distractions (inside vs. outside the classroom) on competency ratings. More research regarding academic status and distraction in general is needed to expand our knowledge of cognitive processes involved in evaluating and judging individuals.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

References

Aronson, E., Turner, J. & Carlsmith, J. M. Communication credibility and communication discrepancy as determinants of opinion change. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1963, 67, 31-36.

Baron, R. S., Baron, P. H. & Miller, N. The relation between distraction and persuasion. Psychological Bulletin, 1973, 80, 310-323.

Bochner, S. & Insko, C. Communicator discrepancy, source credibility, and influence. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1966, 4, 614-621.

Commoner, G. The interpreter effect: Variation in judgements of scientific articles as a function of ideological commitment. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Washington University, 1972.

Dawes, R. M. Cognitive distortion. Psychological Reports, 1964, 14, 443-459.

Franklin, B. J. The effects of status on honesty and verbal responses of others. The Journal of Social Psychology, 1973, 91, 347-348.

Halperin, K., Snyder, C. R., Shenkel, R. J. & Houston, B. K. Effects of source status and message favorability on acceptance of personality feedback. Journal of Applied Psychology, 1976, 61, 85-88.

Hamilton, D. L. Cognitive biases in the perception of social groups. Cognitive and Social Behavior, 1976.

Hamilton, D. L. & Gifford, R. K. Illusory correlation in interpersonal perception: a cognitive basis of stereotypic judgements. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1976, 12, 329-407.

Hollander, E. P. Conformity, status, and idiosyncrasy credit. Psychological Review, 1958, 2, 117-127.

Milgram, S. The experience of living in cities. Science, 1970, 167, 1461-1468.

Rothbart, M., Folero, S., Jensen, C., Howard, J. & Birrell, P. From individual to group impression: Availability heuristics in stereotype information. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, (in press).

Siegel, J. M. & Steele, C. M. Environmental distraction and interpersonal judgements. British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 1980, 19, 23-32.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Wahrman, R. Status, deviance, sanctions, and group discussion. Small Group Behavior, 1977, 8, 147-168.

Table 1

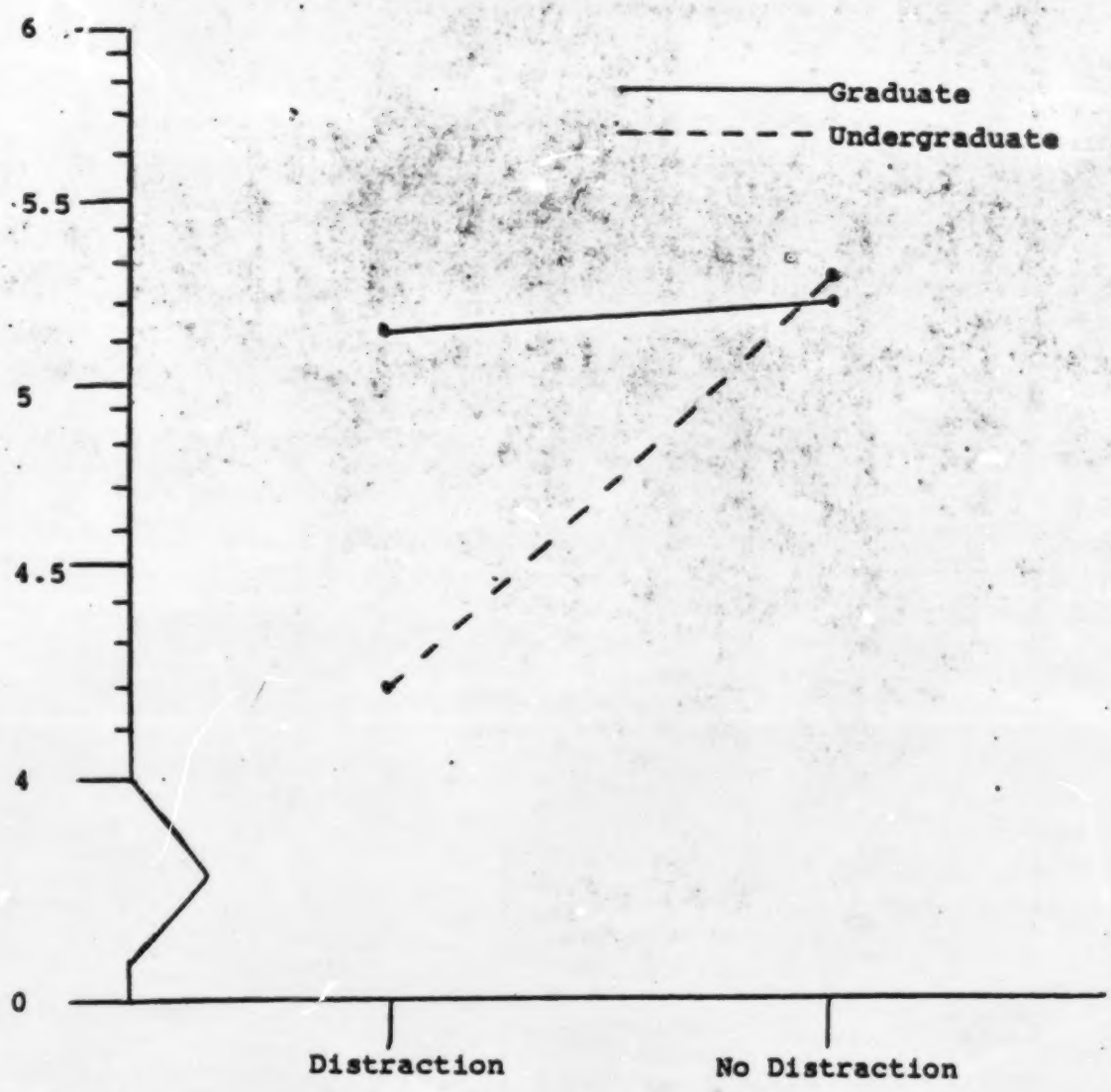
Analysis of Variance of Competency Rating Scores

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Total	55	34.41		
Status (S)	1	1.93	1.93	4.09*
Distraction (D)	1	5.53	5.53	11.72*
S x D	1	2.40	2.40	5.09*
Error	52	24.54	.47	

*$p < .05$.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Mean competency rating of subjects in Distraction (distraction, no distraction) and Academic Status (graduate, undergraduate) conditions.


6
5.5
5
4.5
4
0
Graduate
Undergraduate
Distraction
No Distraction